



As We Honour Queen Elizabeth II's Passing, Let Us Pay Tribute To The Glorious Survival Skills Of Our Constitutional Monarchy

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**Against all odds, the monarchy is among the few still at the crease. Now is the time to remember the virtues of our constitution which continue to stand the test of time.**

Australia and the Commonwealth realms today come together to pay our final respects to Queen Elizabeth II as Her Majesty is laid to rest at Windsor Castle.

The occasion is fraught with unusual ambivalence.

We mourn the passing of a monarch.

We celebrate the triumph of an institution — the monarchy.

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Ours is a “constitutional” one. That makes it more special.

Since the end of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle and the dawn of agriculture, societies all over the world have by-and-large been ruled by some form of monarchy.

The way it worked was, an ambitious warrior would lead an army in a war against a region.

In those days, there were no countries with fixed borders.

Territorial conquest was seen as the highest form of achievement.

If you won, you’d declare yourself the monarch.

This heralded the beginning of a new dynasty based on your bloodline.

Next rulers in line would be your eldest to youngest offspring in the order of birth.

In the absence of an offspring, the heirs to the throne would be your eldest to youngest siblings in the order of birth.

Some monarchies had other rules of succession. But this was the standard model.

Queen Elizabeth II is believed to be a direct descendant of warrior William of Normandy.

He defeated Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings in 1066.

This heralded the beginning of the Norman dynasty — the first of several in a mostly unbroken chain of rulers down to the Windsor dynasty which the Queen belonged to.

As modern-day observers, we place great emphasis on the separation between church (religion) and state (politics).

What we barely appreciate is the equally significant separation between state and government.

The state is more than just a bunch of land.

It’s the territorial embodiment of a national consciousness.

The state embodies the “branding” of the nation it represents.

This features a coat of arms, a flag, an anthem, public holidays, tradition, folklore, poetry, art, literature and architecture.

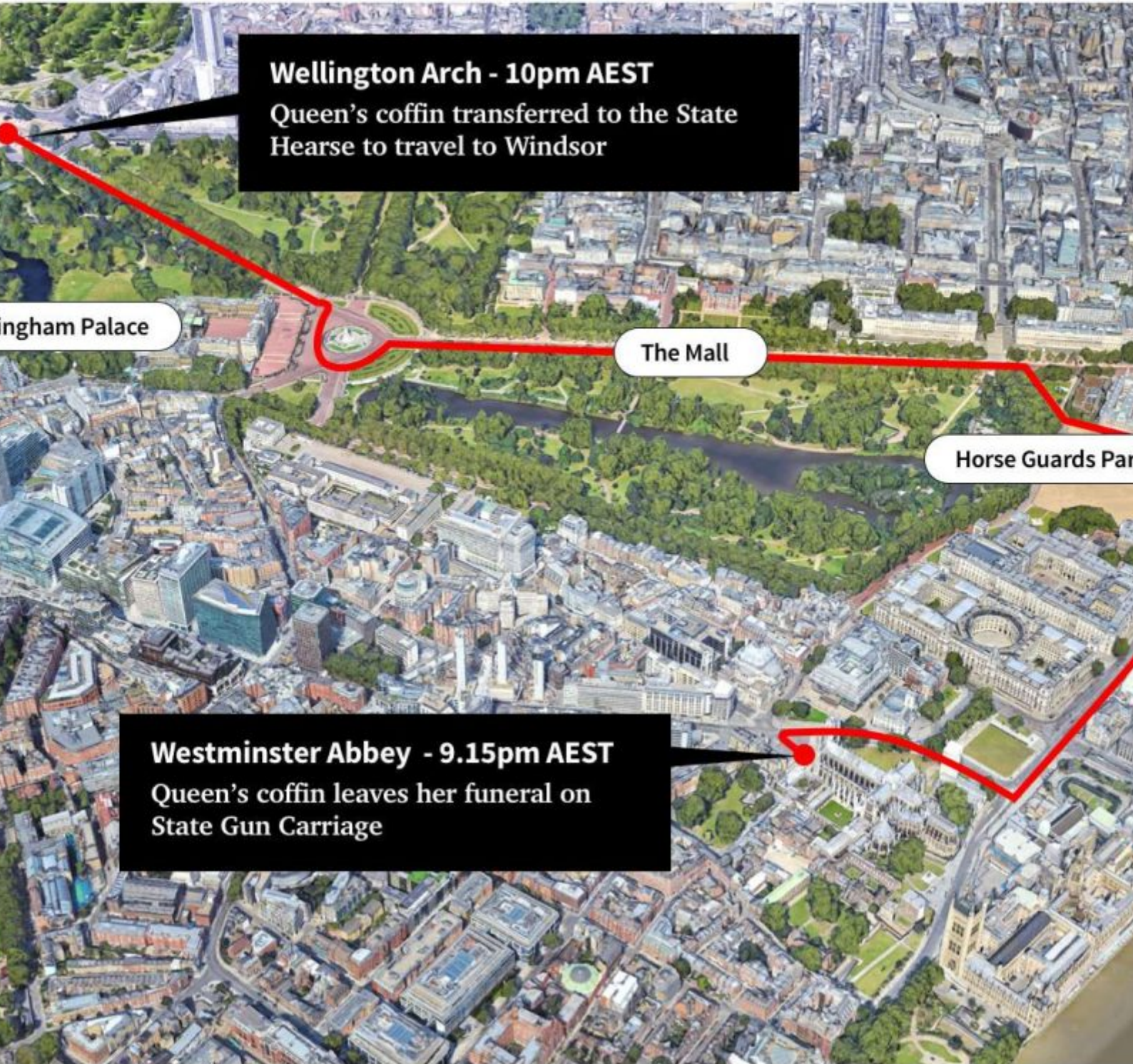
The state provides its citizens a common identity and purpose.





# 's last goodbye

Monday's funeral procession for the Queen





The government on the other hand is a decision-making structure that exists to serve the state.

It can create, edit or delete laws that govern the citizens of the state.

It has oversight over the finances of the state.

It works with the bureaucracy and the judiciary to enforce the rule of law within the state.

The government commands the military to defend the interests of the state.

This separation is a relatively recent development.

For the most part, the ruling monarch had legislative, executive and judicial powers at the same time.

Meaning, the monarch was both head-of-state and head-of-government.

We don't always realise how fortunate we are to have the option to elect our rulers and vote them out if we're dissatisfied.

Most folks couldn't for 5,000 years.

It's only in the last two centuries that we've seen the rise of nationalism and representative democracy gradually coming together to eclipse autocratic monarchies.

Before that, there were neither political parties, nor elections.

Whether or not a society was well-governed was often a matter of luck.

It depended on the personality and temperament of the monarch.

As fallible humans, monarchs could be benevolent or malevolent.

There are examples of both.

If one turned out to be a shocker, there was no option to vote them out.

They ruled by "divine right".

Voicing criticism was punished.

This explains why there have been so many revolts and revolutions against monarchies in Europe over the past thousand years.

King Charles I of England (d. 1649), King Louis XVI of France (d. 1793) and wife Queen Marie Antoinette (d. 1793) were publicly beheaded after failing to satisfy the approval ratings of their time.



The Romanov dynasty of Russia faced an even worse predicament. The Bolshevik revolutionaries went to execute every living member of that royal family in 1917.

Most monarchies have been sent back to the pavilion.

Yet against all odds, the British monarchy is among the few still at the crease.

The last time Australians were asked if we wished to become a republic with a locally elected head-of-state was in 1999.

A resounding 60 per cent voted to keep the monarchy.

Over two decades later, public sentiments haven't changed.

An opinion poll conducted by Roy Morgan after Her Majesty's passing indicated 60 per cent of Australians still aren't ready to ditch the monarchy.

Several countries of the Commonwealth realms have conducted referendums to ascertain the appetite for parting ways with the British Crown.

The results across Northern Ireland (1973), Bermuda (1995), Gibraltar (2002), Falkland Island (2013) and Scotland (2014) have been in favour of sticking with the Crown.

Why is it that a seemingly obsolete institution has not only survived, but continues to enjoy such resounding support?

In short, because the British monarchy ceremonially represents the state. It doesn't politically influence the government.

The government is elected by citizens through democratic elections.

The British monarch doesn't meddle in parliamentary affairs, despite having sufficient provisions to do so.

This self-imposed constraint is the recipe for the Crown's survival.

Yet this arrangement wasn't achieved overnight.

There have been several inflection points along its trajectory as an evolving institution.

King Henry I's Charter of Liberties (1100), King John's signing of the Magna Carta (1215), the Bill of Rights (1689) and the Act of Settlement (1701) are prominent examples.

Out of the 193 countries, it is estimated that 43 are monarchies — not all constitutional.

The Vatican City and Saudi Arabia continue to be autocratic monarchies.



In addition to Britain, there are a dozen other monarchies across continental Europe that are also constitutional.

As critics have exploited the sombre occasion of Her Majesty's passing to ignite debates about another republic referendum, it's important to counter-balance those efforts by highlighting the virtues of our constitutional monarchy.

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